

Something about Juan Hidalgo

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Juan Hidalgo wrote his *El algo* "etcetera" in Madrid in 1970.

I neither shout nor do not shout,
something shouts for me.

This "etcetera" belongs to his first Zaj book –*De Juan Hidalgo*– which brings together all his writings and "etceteras" from 1961 to 1971, ten years of creative activity. I think it is useful, before continuing, to clarify what an "etcetera" is for J.H. This he tells us himself:

I first used the term etcetera in Madrid on May 18, 1965, and I generally define it as a PUBLIC DOCUMENT, as the Chinese (*gong an*) or Japanese (*koo an*) would say.

This something, something that always shouts, that is always present in the life and work of J.H., comes from the text he wrote to dedicate that first Zaj book to his mother.

My mother told me that when she was a young girl living in la mancha with her parents and siblings, at the store they would ask for "the something" after they had finished their shopping.
- give me the something, they would say.
and the shopkeeper would give them lemon gums, dried beans, something.
i also give you this something.

It is Juan Hidalgo who shouts in his role as a multidisciplinary artist, a multimedia artist or, better yet, a "contemporary mannerist"¹ who works in his own fashion –*alla sua maniera*– as Michelangelo once said.

Poetry, visual arts, music, actions, performances and dance are some of the grammars he shouts out.

His grandmother-grandfather was Duchamp, his father Cage, the family friend Erik Satie, and the friend of his friends Buenaventura Durruti.

As a high school student he did well in his composition assignments. He wrote and read a lot. He especially read Russian and Hungarian literature and, secretly, Jardiel Poncela's books and anything he could lay his hands on. He was very keen on poetry, which has possessed him since, becoming the central nucleus of his life and work.

Nearly all his "writings" and books appear in poetry treatises and anthologies, and he appreciatively enjoys being considered one of the "eight rare poets" in Spain².

J.H. usually says that Spanish musicians talk about him as if he were a plastic artist and plastic artists as if he were a musician, and only poets see him as a poet.

During his secondary school years chemistry became his great passion, and in some of his etceteras and in some of his photographic actions, as well as in some of his objects, the trace of that passion survives.

It was also in secondary school that, without diminishing his dedication to drawing, he discovered music, to which he has given himself over since. Other interests surfaced too: a passion, which has remained with him, for foreign languages and, later, for dance, which he studied under the talented Russian ballerina Marina Noreg at her academy on Calle de San Pablo in Barcelona.

Also in Barcelona, Xavier Montsalvatge became his first teacher of composition and the driving force behind his future career as a composer.

I quote here, with permission, some paragraphs from J.H.'s autobiographical statement that provide a curious insight of his childhood years and development.

During my childhood three activities were of paramount importance to me:

Big cut-out theatres that included almost all the devices used on stage, to which one added lightning with tiny light bulbs and on which one placed different characters that were also cut-outs.

Visiting the central telephone exchange in the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on Domingo J. Navarro street and spending hours looking at the telephone operators using the plugs which surprisingly turned on and off a host of little light bulbs coloured red, green, and marvellous aphonic violet-blue.

Sitting in the centre of my playroom in which, at my request, two or more large light bulbs were placed on the corners of the room and covered with creased sheets of different colour tissue paper that I would occasionally change and contemplate, engrossed, for long periods of time. This was undoubtedly my first *mandala*.

Later his life and his way of thinking turned "nomadic". He lived, studied and worked in Paris, Geneva and Italy. He spent seventeen years in Milan and almost three in Rome, and he travelled throughout Europe, Africa, Canada, and the United States.

In Milan he became one of the artists of Gino di Maggio's Galleria Multipla and one of the friends and collaborators of the great Milanese printer and cultural promoter Gianni Sassi, with whom he works and cooperates year after year in *Milano-Poesia*, the magnificent festival of contemporary art and poetry held in Milan.

One day he discovered a perfume. The perfume of Zen Buddhism, with which he scented himself from that moment on, and he studied Chinese and Japanese in Milan and Rome at the *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente*, showing particular interest in the Chinese-Japanese calligraphy that opened his eyes to the most minute detail.

As doctor Marañón said: "Saints, Conquerors and Artists are highly sexed beings."

Without a solid sexual instinct, there is insufficient strength to trace out a good creative trajectory. In J.H. sex is also a basic motive in some works. I quote his comment regarding *Twenty two photographs around... a penis*.

The germinal idea for these 22 photographic actions came to me in Santa Cruz de Tenerife in March of 1981. During 9 years they have been incubating in the warmth of my left testicle. Today, on September 19, 1990, they have abandoned it in order to lead their own life. I love the ceremony, rite and history of art.

In 1964 he gave life to Zaj in time while "becoming aware of the subtle usefulness of the useless", as Okakura Kakuzo pointed out, and also paying heed to the supreme advice of the Chinese emperor who said:

It is pointless to look for great precision
or certainty.

I do not feel capable of finishing these notes on J.H. without first sharing with you his definition of art, a text written in November of 1995, and poetic art, this one dating from 1996, both of which are published in the seminal catalogue of his retrospective exhibition *De Juan Hidalgo (1957-1997)*.

¿WHAT IS ART?

Art is like being at home on a Sunday morning in sandals, shorts and a T-shirt

It is Milton's *Lost Paradise*, the age of innocence

It is the penetrating aroma of white, pink and blue broom on Canary Island mountain tops

It is the laser beam that crosses everything
It is the atomic bomb of the being

It is the continuous orgasm of intelligence

It is the grime on a foot that has never been washed

It is the perfume of the excrements of the death

It is the art that takes the best part

It is...

and

POETIC ART

The arrow shot out and
the heart was pierced
at its core

The subtle uselessness of the
Useless

Failure

The perfume of a perfume
of a perfume

Reflect what is reflected
while it is reflected

Boredom

Knowing how to be(have) without be(ing)

Not knowing

A certain kind of sex

A certain kind of love

The relentless pursuit of twilight

The uncertain state of a smile

I know

And a great big fart.

So

Juan Hidalgo neither shouts nor does not shout,
Something shouts for him.

Ayacata, November 2003

- 1 Gustav René Hocke, *El mundo como laberinto. I. El manierismo en el arte* (El manierismo en el arte europeo de 1520 a 1650 y en el actual), Ediciones Guadarrama, Madrid, 1961 [Spanish translation by José Rey Aneiros]. This book was originally published under the title of *Die Welt als Labyrinth, Manier und Manie in der Europäischen Kunst*, Rowohlt press, Hamburg, 1959.
- 2 *8 poetas raros, conversaciones y poemas* [edited by José María Parreño and José Luis Gallero], Árdora Ediciones, Madrid, 1992.